

Shortly after he turned seventeen—a few months ago—Vance Aandahl sold his first story, to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Later that same week, he sold his second story—the following admirably economical rendering of the attitudes of youth and age, and the rhythm of the universe. You will surely be seeing more of Vance Aandahl's work, here and elsewhere—he is, we believe, a born writer.

IT'S A GREAT BIG WONDERFUL UNIVERSE

by Vance Aandahl

"SEVEN-CARD STUD," SAYS Three-fingers. "It's a double-action game."

"Wow!" say I. "Seven-card stud!"

"Deal," says Silver, giggling to himself and stroking the mauve fur on his left ear.

Cards drift gently to the table: two down and one up; Silver is high with an ace, but look out for my hidden kings! Two minutes later: I've got seventy credits in my pocket, I'm as free as a deep spacer (once was, remember that), and I'm dancing down the neon-lit streets of New Denver. Snockered too—Threefingers is gay with his juice, so to speak, and I've sneaked a little through there. Seventy credits and snockered too! It's a great big wonderful universe!

What's this? I'm still dancing, but the neon lights have disappeared and I can almost see the sky. Now I know: it's TVtown and here come the addicts, jumping up and down. Who's that? The big man with the little flute—he's singing a song:

"Dancing on the sidewalk
At the close of day,
Seven hundred madmen—
White and black and gray—
Spoke to me in whispers,
Hushed and monotone,
Spoke to me of dangers,
Terrible, unknown!"

The big man turns around now,
and the others whisper at him:

"Television got us! Television
got us!
Beware the Television!
He'll get you!
He'll get you . . ."

Then the big man sings again:

"Bleeding from their eyeballs
At the close of day,
Seven hundred madmen—
White and black and gray—
Screamed at me with howls,
Hideous and shrill,
Screamed at me of dangers,
Nameless, nameless still!"

Taking flute to mouth, the big
man faces his followers; they howl
at him:

"Television got us! Television
got us!
Beware the Television!
He'll get you!
He'll get you . . ."

Having had enough, I depart
in time-warp style. I land on Hog
Street, and immediately decided to
spend my seventy credits on Miss
Plastic Wonders, a little android
number that strolls up and con-
firms my joyous outlook on life.
Wow! Fifty/twenty/thirty-five,
and the best materials in the
trade! At this crucial moment,
guess who shows up?

Grandfather Adler!

Grandfather Adler—he's in
New Denver! I forget about Miss

Plastic Wonders and her portable
wares. Now I chase Grandfather
Adler into a little place that
caters to deep spacers.

First, a word of warning: if
you've never seen a deep spacer,
you've never seen Grandfather
Adler. He's a giant man, seven
feet tall, with a chest and belly
that look like a Pleidean swamp
tree. His arms are too long and
his legs are too short. His bright
blue eyes are covered with bright
orange cataracts.

I squeeze through a group of
Vegans, thread my way among the
ten-foot moonsiders who are danc-
ing like shadows, climb over a
prostrate Venusian, shove past
some Plutonian miners, and edge
around a quad game involving a
bomash peddler and something
from the Horsehead Nebula. Now
I get a better look at my old, old
buddy.

How old? Grandfather Adler
must be two hundred years old.
His face is full of old-man bags
and old-man wrinkles, like the
face of a Centurian centaur.

I go past the bar where J. C.
Flipson is serving Megan tranre-
laxos, carefully circle the hatchet-
head clique, bump into a Sirian
sculptor with only seven crests,
and then . . .

"Grandfather Adler!"

"Ay, boy. What is it?"

"You've seen the wonders of
the universe, Grandfather Adler.
You've seen them all."

"Ay, boy."

"You've seen the silver moons and the blue suns and the rusty star dust and the sepia radiation motes, you've seen green cliffs and opal water, you've seen the beauty dance of the Gilly people."

"Ay, boy."

"You've sailed purple seas and walked in twilight lands that no other man has seen or ever will see, you've warped through a star core and you've garked the bip—and still you're the same old Grandfather Adler."

"Ay, boy."

"But . . . you're unhappy."

"Ay, boy."

Around his neck there's a little brown bag.

"Grandfather Adler, what do you have in that little brown bag around your neck?"

"Earth from Earth, boy."

"Earth? They blew her up fifty years ago."

"Ay, boy."

"What kind of Earth do you have, Grandfather Adler?"

"A little bunch of grass and a little bit of dirt. I'm not sure—I

haven't looked at it for ten years. Do you know what grass is? I got it just before they blew her up. A little bunch of grass and a little bit of dirt."

"Why are you unhappy, Grandfather Adler? You've seen the whole universe. Why do you carry a bag of Earth?"

Behind us, the Martians tune up their throbbing strings and skirking pipes. Enter a chorus of anti-matter chicks from New Cairo.

"All your life you've carried a bag of Earth."

"No, boy. All my life a bag of Earth has carried me."

Before I can answer, we are disturbed by the TVtowners, who come prancing into the establishment. J. C. Flipson pops the big flutist; taking a hint, the rest of us pile on, so to speak, and beat up every cutie-mutie in the bunch (just for fun, remember). In the scuffle, Grandfather Adler disappears—I hunt all night, but he's gone for good.

I wonder why he's so unhappy. It's a great big wonderful universe.

